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THE ROMANES LECTURE

1912

Lord Chatham as an Orator

BY

HENRY MONTAGU BUTLER, D.D.

HON. D.C.L. OXFORD, HON. LLD. GLASGOW AND ST. ANDREWS
MASTER OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE
HON. CANON OF ELY
CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO THE KING

DELIVERED

IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE

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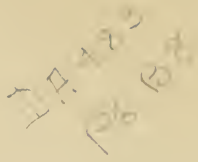

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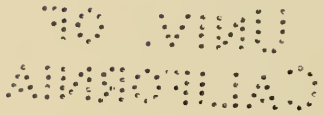

LORD CHATHAM AS AN ORATOR

I

In Him Demosthenes was heard again,
Liberty taught him her Athenian strain;
She clothed him with authority and awe,
Spoke from his lips, and in his looks gave law;
His speech, his form, his action, full of grace,
And all his Country beaming in his face.

W. Cowper, *Table Talk.*

Mr. Vice-Chancellor,

When, Sir, you first honoured and almost appalled me by proposing that I should deliver the Romanes Lecture of this year, I was sorely perplexed to find any subject on which I could presume to address such an audience as this. After some days of pondering I was rash enough to propose to you a subject the range of which I had culpably failed to measure.

Having been interested all my life in English Parliamentary Oratory, I at first fancied it possible to sketch its history and its influence during roughly speaking a century and a half, from the time of Chatham to the time of Gladstone, both of them by the by Oxford men. But second thoughts told me that I had made a grave blunder. 'Second thoughts' have had their eulogists and their assailants. Euripides,[1] now so dear at Oxford to both sexes, has pronounced in immortal words that 'second thoughts are somehow the wiser'.

[1] Αἱ δεύτεραί πως φροντίδες σοφώτεραι, *Hippol.* 436.

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Cardinal Newman[1] has shrewdly observed that the proverb is true of matters of judgement but not of matters of conscience.

A third authority, having it must be owned little in common with either the Poet of the Troades or the great Fellow of Oriel, wrote almost reproachfully in 1797 to the son of Lord Chatham: 'I never assent till I am convinced what is proposed is right, and then I keep. Then I never allow that to be destroyed by after-thoughts, which on all subjects tend to weaken, never to strengthen, the original proposal.' This, Sir, was the ethical judgement of King George III,[2] based upon a long and surely consistent personal experience.

In my own unhappy dilemma, what was I to do? Conscience said, 'Keep faith with the Vice-Chancellor.' Judgement said, plainly and more plainly, 'It would be hopeless in one hour's address, even before the most indulgent audience, to deal even tolerably with a period in which at least fifteen orators of the highest class were mighty in Parliament, Chatham, Burke, Charles Fox, William Pitt, Sheridan, Grattan, Plunket, Canning, Sir Robert Peel, Lord Brougham, Lord Derby, Macaulay, John Bright, Disraeli, Gladstone.

As I gazed wistfully on this grand gallery of portraits, it became more and more clear that I could not obey both conscience and judgement; and so, as is so often the case, conscience had to give way to judgement, and to throw itself on some dispensing power for a gracious, if not a plenary, absolution.

I think I may say that the Vice-Chancellor, who has known the penitent for fifty years, has already in part absolved him. It remains to be seen if his audience will be equally indulgent to a stranger, and whether, in their presence, he may dare to appeal from the rough Aeschy-

[1] *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. iv. 36.

[2] *Pitt and Napoleon*, p. 240, Dr. Holland Rose.

lean severity of King George III to the gentler and more subtle sophistications of Euripides.

Our present subject is of narrower dimensions than its still-born predecessor, though amply wide enough for a single lecture—'Lord Chatham as an Orator.'

It will be my endeavour to bring before you this great man not directly as a Statesman, who during some unforgotten years held the destinies of Great Britain in his powerful grasp, but as an Orator, who, in Mr. Lecky's not too inflated words, 'must rank with the very greatest who have ever lived.'[1]

As we speak of him, we shall be thinking of Oratory partly as an art, partly as a branch of literature, partly as a power of making history.

But here it strikes me as more than possible that something of a misgiving may haunt us—I confess that it does haunt myself—whether such a subject is not a little obsolete, and even a little second-rate; whether Oratory is still either a power to be reckoned with, or even an art to be studied and honoured.

So far as I can judge, there is distinctly less interest in it than in the days that I remember, sixty, fifty, years ago. It is less talked of. It is less read about. It is less taught in Schools. A hundred years ago, and fifty years ago, the training of the young English gentry in the difficult art of elocution was the avowed aim of Speech days. Less than fifty-five years have passed since on one Speech day, one which I cannot quite forget, a fine speech was delivered by a dear and highly gifted pupil, Frank Jeune, soon to be a Scholar of Balliol and afterwards to be known, though but for a few short months, as Lord St. Helier. As the young speaker sat down, old Lord Brougham was heard to murmur, 'Perfect Oratory.'

[1] *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, ii, chap. viii, p. 467.

The mention of that once powerful name reminds me of a letter which he wrote in March, 1826, to Zachary Macaulay, the father of the future Historian. Brougham had heard of the fame of young Tom Macaulay at our Cambridge Union Society, and wrote to his friend a long and eager letter of which, thirty years afterwards, I was allowed to make a copy. In it he insists on the vast importance of cultivated oratory, if a young man wishes to have 'almost absolute power in a free country of doing good to mankind'. He lays the greatest stress on studying two very different authors, Demosthenes and Dante, as models of chaste style; and, like Cicero in the *De Oratore*,[1] he urges that perfection can only come by much writing. He goes on to cite one curious fact from his own experience which may flutter the dove-cotes of our own Union Societies in these days of Modern Sides and suspended animation of Greek. 'I assure you,' he says, 'that both in Courts of Law and in Parliament, and even to mobs, I never made half so much play as when I was almost translating from the Greek.'

II

But to come now to closer quarters, let me try, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, to restore, however faintly, and mainly by the help of others, some few at least of the oratorical lineaments of a splendid Englishman, who has lain in his grave in our ancient Abbey for more than a hundred and thirty years; the man whom Burke[2] described, though hardly in a flattering passage, as 'a great and celebrated name; a name that keeps the name of this country

[1] 'Stilus optimus et praestantissimus dicendi effector ac magister.' *De Or.* i. 33.

[2] Speech on American Taxation, April 19, 1774.

respectable in every other on the globe'; the man of whom William Cowper[1] wrote:

England, with all thy faults, I love thee still.
. . . . . .
Time was when it was pride and boast enough
In every clime, and travel where we might,
That we were born her children. Praise enough
To fill th' ambition of a private man,
That Chatham's language was his native tongue
And Wolfe's great name compatriot with his own.

The speeches of the first Pitt have, as is well known, reached us only in fragments, especially those which he delivered in the House of Commons in the days of his prime. He left that House in 1766, when he was fifty-seven years of age, grievously broken by constant and acute attacks of gout. It was not till 1770 that he became active in the House of Lords. Of his speeches delivered there in the course of eight years about fourteen have been fairly reported.

What, then, was the special mark or note of his oratory? Was he like or unlike other famous speakers, ancient or modern?

Cowper, indeed, has told us in lines that suggest a Statue:

In Him Demosthenes was heard again,
Liberty taught him her Athenian strain;
She clothed him with authority and awe,
Spoke from his lips, and in his looks gave law;
His speech, his form, his action, full of grace,
And all his Country beaming in his face.

It would not be difficult to find points of resemblance between the great Athenian and the great Englishman. Each was a mighty master of invective. Each was an impassioned patriot. But I hope it is no irreverence towards either of them or towards that excellent poet Cowper which prompts me to confess that I have always

[1] *The Task*, Book II.

enjoyed the *dictum* of his great and gruff contemporary. Boswell, with his usual candour, tells us that he once said to Johnson, 'Do you think, Sir, that Burke has read Cicero much?' The obvious growl in reply answers, if it does not silence, many such futile questions. 'I don't believe it, Sir. Burke is neither like Cicero, nor like Demosthenes, nor like any one else, but speaks as well as he can.'

As well as he can. If this means as well as he could do after much thought and much preparation, I doubt whether Johnson's *dictum*, undoubtedly true of Burke, can be held to apply to Chatham; for all accounts agree that he less than almost any first-rate English speaker knew when he rose what he meant to say.

Doubtless in early years he had thought much on the art of speaking and even the choice of words, but his applications of the art seem to have been in the strictest sense *ex tempore*, as little expected by himself as by his hearers.

Let me offer you just a few fragments or pickings from what some of our best modern critics have reported. Mr. Lecky speaks of 'the blasting fury of his invective, the force, fire, and majesty of a declamation which thrilled and awed the most fastidious audience'. His speeches 'usually took the tone of a singularly elevated, rapid, and easy conversation'. Another critic uses this same word, 'a kind of conversation, not a speech, for he never came with a prepared harangue.' Mr. Lecky again says, 'there was something in the speaker immeasurably greater even than his words. . . . He delighted in touching the moral chords, in appealing to strong passions.'

Macaulay's testimony, in the first of his two famous Essays, is well known. 'He was no speaker of set speeches. His few prepared discourses were complete

failures. The elaborate panegyric which he pronounced on General Wolfe was considered as the very worst of all his performances.'

This is borrowed from Horace Walpole.

Macaulay, like others, dwells on his outward advantages, 'his figure strikingly graceful and commanding, his features high and noble, his eye full of fire. . . . His action was described by a very malignant observer as equal to that of Garrick. . . . On the stage he would have been the finest Brutus or Coriolanus ever known. . . . His play of countenance was wonderful. . . . Every tone, from the impassioned cry to the thrilling aside, was perfectly at his command. His speeches abounded with lively illustrations, well-told anecdotes, happy allusions, passionate appeals. His invective and sarcasm were terrific. Perhaps no English orator was ever so much feared.'

Few of our critics have shown more sympathetic insight than Lord Rosebery in the closing chapter of his recent Memoir. He quotes Lord Chesterfield as saying that 'Mr. Pitt carried with him unpremeditated the strength of thunder and the splendour of lightning'. Lord Rosebery, with a skill and grace of his own, gives us an imaginary picture of Pitt rising in a House, 'which subsides at once into silence and eager attention.' He follows him from 'a solemn and impressive opening' through a perpetually varied entertainment of reminiscence, of anecdote, of ridicule, of sublime appeal, of menacing whisper, of lofty declamation. 'All through the speech men sit as though paralysed, though many are heated with wine.' He ends this part of his criticism by saying, and I believe with truth: 'In the century which followed Chatham's death there was an illustrious succession of orators and debaters; and yet none of these eminent men, with all their accurately reported

speeches, have left so deep an impress of eloquence as the elder Pitt, who was not reported at all. . . . His utterances with a sort of wireless telegraphy seemed to thrill the nation which neither heard nor read them.'

We have perhaps been too lavish in quotation, but you would blame me if I did not give you a few of the epigrammatic words of the Irish Grattan, who had the good fortune to hear the great English orator with his own ears. Grattan's language, once heard or read, is not easily forgotten or put aside.

'The Secretary', he says, 'stood alone. Modern degeneracy had not reached him. Original and unaccommodating, the features of his character had the hardihood of antiquity. With one hand he smote the House of Bourbon, and wielded in the other the democracy of England. His eloquence was an era in the senate, peculiar and spontaneous, familiarly expressing gigantic sentiments and instinctive wisdom.' 'He lightened upon his subject, and reached the point by the flashings of his mind, which, like those of his eye, were felt but could not be followed.'

III

Let us now put to some kind of test some of these emphatic judgements, by turning to the Orator himself. I propose to recall, though with very different degrees of fullness, two debates in the House of Commons, dated November, 1755, and January, 1766; and again six debates in the House of Lords, dated respectively January, 1770, May, 1774, January, 1775, May, 1777, November, 1777, April 7, 1778.

I shall offer you just enough of historical framing to account for the object, the tone, and the language used; but I shall ask you to bear in mind that our aim is not to criticize statesmanship, or to revive history, or to

correct traditions, but simply to hear, as intelligently as we can, a voice which once could move and warn and terrify.

We begin, then, with the year 1755, five years before the death of George II. The Duke of Newcastle has been Prime Minister for nearly two years, succeeding his younger brother, Henry Pelham. War has just broken out with France, and the King and his Government are bent on a system of foreign treaties backed by foreign subsidies. Henry Fox, the first Lord Holland, has been made Secretary of State and Leader of the House of Commons, to the exclusion of Pitt, who is left in his old subordinate position as only Paymaster of the Forces. Pitt, who had been fairly loyal to Pelham, has but little respect for Newcastle. Before the Duke had been a full year in office, his nominal colleague astonished the House by asking 'in tones of thunder' whether 'Parliament sat only to register the edicts of *one* too-powerful *subject*'.

Another year passed, and in November, 1755, again the Houses met. In the vivid language of Macaulay, based on the contemporary evidence of Horace Walpole, 'Public opinion was wound up to the height. After ten quiet years there was to be an Opposition, countenanced by the Heir-Apparent of the Throne, and headed by the most brilliant orator of the age. The debate on the Address was long remembered as one of the greatest Parliamentary conflicts of that generation. It began at three in the afternoon, and lasted till five the next morning. It was on this night that young Gerard Hamilton delivered that "single speech" from which his nickname was derived. His eloquence threw into the shade every orator except Pitt, who declaimed against the subsidies for an hour and a half with extraordinary energy and effect.'

So far Macaulay, writing in 1834 from his post in India.

Horace Walpole, in a letter to his friend Conway on November 15, which by the by was Pitt's forty-seventh birthday, first passes a warm eulogy on the maiden speech of young 'Single-Speech' Hamilton, and then continues, 'You will ask, what could be beyond this? Nothing, but what was beyond whatever was, and that was Pitt! He spoke at past one, for an hour and thirty-five minutes: there was more humour, wit, vivacity, finer language, more boldness, in short, more astonishing perfections, than even you, who are used to him, can conceive. He was not abusive, yet very attacking on all sides. He ridiculed my Lord Hillsborough, crushed poor Sir George,[1] terrified the Attorney,[2] lashed my Lord Granville,[3] painted my Lord of Newcastle, attacked Mr. Fox, and even hinted up to the Duke of Cumberland,' that is, the conqueror at Culloden.

Writing the next day to another friend, Mr. Richard Bentley, Walpole is even more ecstatic. 'Pitt surpassed himself, and then I need not tell you that he surpassed Cicero and Demosthenes. What a figure would they, with their formal, laboured, cabinet orations, make *vis-à-vis* his manly vivacity and dashing eloquence at one o'clock in the morning, after sitting in that heat for eleven hours! He spoke above an hour and a half, with scarce a bad sentence. The most admired part was a comparison he drew of the two parts of the new administration, to the conflux of the Rhone and the Saone at Lyons: "the latter a gentle, feeble, languid stream, languid but not deep; the other a boisterous

[1] Lyttelton.

[2] The Attorney-General, afterwards the great Lord Mansfield.

[3] Formerly Lord Carteret.

and overbearing torrent; but they join at last; and long may they continue united, to the comfort of each other, and to the glory, honour, and happiness of this nation!"'

A rhetorical shaft, fledged with metaphor, does not always fly straight to the bull's-eye; and, if we may trust an amusing story told by Walpole, so it fared with this celebrated missile. Fox, who by all the rules of war ought to have considered himself a dead man, had the face to ask Pitt good-humouredly, after the division, 'Who is the Rhone?', the Saone of course being Newcastle. Pitt replied, 'Is that a fair question?' 'Why,' said Fox, 'as you have said so much that I did not desire to hear, you may tell me one thing that I would hear. Am I the Rhone or Lord Granville?' Pitt answered, 'You are Granville.'

It is of this Parliamentary Coblentz figure of the two French rivers that Lord Rosebery writes in his summing up of the grand debate: 'These are all the shreds that remain of this glorious rhapsody. It would perhaps be better that nothing had survived. Each student must try and reconstruct for himself, like some rhetorical Owen, out of these poor bones the majestic structure of Pitt's famous speech.'

One result of it, I may mention in passing. Pitt was at once dismissed from office, and no wonder.

Within three years, in 1758, he was at the height of his power. By coalescing with Newcastle, and reserving to himself, as Secretary of State, the entire management of all Foreign affairs, for nearly four years he made England the terror of France and the wonder of Europe.

Some of my hearers may have read—is it possible that one or two octogenarians may have even heard?—the description of that renowned Administration by Dr. Arnold in 1842, when, as Regius Professor of Modern

History, he spoke in this place to an eager audience of friends and foes, all on that great day his friends:

'It is well known that the administration of the first William Pitt was a period of unanimity unparalleled in our annals. Popular and antipopular parties had gone to sleep together. The great Minister wielded the energies of the whole united nation. France and Spain were trampled in the dust; Protestant Germany saved; all North America was the dominion of the British Crown; the vast foundations were laid of our empire in India.'

Add to this one significant sentence from Macaulay, 'the Journals of the House of Commons, during four sessions, contain no trace of a division on a party question.'

But it is not in halcyon days of calm that we expect to meet the Orator. Eloquence loves, and almost needs, the storm.

Let us pass over five years. Let us come from 1761, when Pitt was turned out of office, to 1766. How much has happened in the interval! Throughout the next four years counsels very different from his prevailed. Tares were sown, destined to issue in fatal harvests. During much of this period Pitt was tormented by gout, and absent from the tumult of politics. But in 1766 he returned, and his return 'made history'.

IV

Let me, then, lead you, however abruptly, to his latest speech in the House of Commons, January 14, 1766. The Bill for the Repeal of George Grenville's Stamp Act was being pressed through the House by Lord Rockingham's Ministers. A sentence of Macaulay's makes it live for us. 'Two great orators and statesmen', he says, 'belonging to two different generations repeatedly put forth all their powers in defence of the

Bill. The House of Commons heard Pitt for the last time and Burke for the first time, and was in doubt to which of them the palm of eloquence should be assigned. It was indeed a splendid sunset and a splendid dawn.'

The occasion was truly critical. The ill-starred measure of Grenville, dating from March, 1765, had done its work. The Colonies, hitherto so loyal, were furious. In August grave disturbances broke out. The news of the riots reached England in the course of the autumn. The violence of the rioters was everywhere denounced. The House of Commons met on January 14. Mr. Pitt spoke early in the debate. There was keen excitement to know what line the Great Commoner would adopt. For two years he had been rarely heard in Parliament. When he rose to speak, he began, we are told, in a low tone of voice. But the low tone was not long maintained. He was in no mood for soft words or suppressed convictions.

Turning to his brother-in-law, George Grenville, who had been dismissed from the Premiership half a year before, and now sat on the bench close to him, he observed, as it were incidentally, 'As to the late Ministers, every capital measure they took was—entirely wrong! As to the present gentlemen,' that is, Lord Rockingham's short-lived colleagues, 'I have no objections. I have never been made a sacrifice to any of them. Their characters are fair, and I am always glad when men of fair character engage in His Majesty's service. . . . But notwithstanding—for I love to be explicit—I cannot give them my confidence. Pardon me, gentlemen,' bowing to the Ministry, 'confidence is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom'—he was then a little over 57—'youth is the season of credulity.'

Is it only ignorance of the annals of Parliament which leads me to doubt whether language of this order, so lordly, so imperious, so patronizing, had ever before or has ever since been heard in either House of the British Parliament, from either side of the table? It was then a 'new style'. To-day it might seem to be either antiquated or premature.

Soon the ex-invalid becomes more serious, and, as the vision of his own great days rises before him, even provocative. Quebec, Wolfe, seem again in view, Amherst, Anson, Clive, Hawke, Rodney, above all, his life-long pride and boast, the reclaimed and enlisted Highlanders.

'I have no local attachments,' he cries. 'It is indifferent to me whether a man was rocked in his cradle on this or that side of the Tweed. I sought for merit wherever it was to be found. It is my boast that I was the first Minister who looked for it and found it in the mountains of the North. I called it forth, and drew into your service a hardy and intrepid race of men—men, who when left by your jealousy, became a prey to the artifices of your enemies, and had gone nigh to overturn the State in the war before the last. These men, in the last war,'—that is in the Canadian War, of which Quebec was the most enduring monument—'these men in the last war, were brought to combat on your side. They served with fidelity as they fought with valour, and conquered for you in every part of the world. Detested be the national reflections against them! They are unjust, groundless, illiberal, unmanly. When I ceased to serve His Majesty as a Minister'—that was in the too well remembered 1761—'it was not the *country* of the man by which I was moved'—it was not the Scotland of Lord Bute whose influence with the young King had

forced him to resign—'but the *man* of that country wanted wisdom, and held principles incompatible with freedom.'

But so far our leader has only been skirmishing. Now he brings up his battalions closer to the point of attack. America alone is now his theme—the Taxation of America; the fierce rebellion in America, which the last mails have announced; the present attempt of Ministers to repeal the abominable Stamp Act.

He begins, as often, with a touch of not ungraceful egotism. I think we may say that in political speeches egotism, if it does not disgust, is rather a favourite. Even in dull ears there is an involuntary pricking up at the most delicate overture of a 'l'État c'est moi'. But the egotist must be a Somebody, if not quite a Louis XIV.

'It is a long time, Mr. Speaker,' so Mr. Pitt begins, 'since I have attended in Parliament. When the resolution was taken in this House of Commons'—that is, as we have seen, early in 1765 by his brother-in-law George Grenville—'I was ill in bed.' The gout, as we shall see, and the crutch play a prominent part in Pitt's later oratory.

'If,' he continues, 'if I could have endured to be carried in my bed, so great was the agitation of my mind, I would have solicited some kind hand to have laid me down on this floor, to have borne my testimony against it! It is now an Act that has passed. I would speak with decency of every Act of this House, but I must beg the indulgence of the House to speak of it with freedom.'

Then he proceeds to give his now well-known opinion of what we should call the unconstitutional character of the Stamp Act.

'It is my opinion that this kingdom has no right to lay a tax upon the Colonies. . . . The colonists are

the subjects of this kingdom, equally entitled with yourselves to all the natural rights of mankind and the peculiar privileges of Englishmen. . . . The Americans are the sons, not the bastards, of England.'

Imagine the effect of such a sentence at such a time, the atmosphere throughout the land so charged with electricity!

The principle that 'Taxation is no part of the governing or legislative power,' he argues at length and with lively vehemence, but the *rebellion* of the colonists which is in every one's mind has not yet come. He even sits down, as if weak and exhausted, without dealing with this crucial topic.

Then follows a considerable pause.

At length General Conway speaks on behalf of the Government, and then George Grenville in defence of his own offspring, the accursed Stamp Act. As he sits down, Mr. Pitt again rises, with several other members. There are loud shouts for 'Mr. Pitt, Mr. Pitt'. The Speaker calls to order, and after a time decides that Mr. Pitt may speak again.

Amid shouts of 'Go on, Go on', the incensed combatant proceeds to his final assault. And with what arms, with what artillery? We still seem to hear its thunder.

'Gentlemen, Sir'—so he begins—'have been charged with giving birth to sedition in America. Several have spoken their sentiments with freedom against this unhappy Act, and that freedom has become their crime. Sorry I am to hear the liberty of speech in this House imputed as a crime. But the imputation shall not discourage me. It is a liberty I mean to exercise. No gentleman ought to be afraid to exercise it. It is a liberty by which the gentleman who calumniated it

might have profited. He *ought* to have profited. He ought to have desisted from his project.

'The gentleman tells us America is obstinate; America is almost in open rebellion.

'I rejoice that America has resisted. Three millions of people so dead to all the feelings of liberty as voluntarily to let themselves be made slaves, would have been fit instruments to make slaves of all the rest.'

'*I rejoice that America has resisted.*' What a lightning-flash is there! The Great Commoner, five years ago almost the arbiter of Europe, now an ally of the American rebels, just as reports of their insulting outrages are exasperating and hardening most English hearts! I know of no sentence by any English speaker more exactly like Chatham, more unlike nearly all others.

One more topic in this historic speech—the comparative strength of the combatants; on the one side the great Mother Country that under Pitt's inspiration, between 1758 and 1761, had performed such wonders in every part of the world; and on the other side three millions of irritated colonists, without generals, without artillery, without fleets. What has the conqueror of Quebec to say to this contrast? He is now nearing his goal.

'A great deal has been said without doors of the power, of the strength, of America. It is a topic that ought to be cautiously meddled with.

'In a good cause, on a sound bottom, the force of this country can crush America to atoms. I know the valour of your troops. I know the skill of your officers.

'There is not a company of foot that has served in America out of which you may not pick a man of

sufficient knowledge and experience to make a Governor of a Colony there. But on *this ground*, on the Stamp Act, where so many here will think it a crying injustice, I am one who will lift up my hands against it.

'In such a cause even your success would be hazardous. America, if she fell, would fall like the strong man. She would embrace the pillars of the State, and pull down the Constitution along with her.

'Is this your boasted peace? To sheathe the sword, not in its scabbard, but in the bowels of your countrymen! . . . The Americans have not acted in all things with prudence and temper.' No indeed, their violence and their insults at Boston have infuriated even moderate men at home. But, says Pitt, 'The Americans have been wronged. They have been driven to madness by injustice. Will you punish them for the madness which you have occasioned?

'Rather let prudence and temper come from this side. I will undertake for America that she will follow the example.

'There are two lines in a ballad of Prior's, of a man's behaviour to his wife, so applicable to you and your colonies that I cannot help repeating them:

> Be to her faults a little blind,
> Be to her virtues very kind.

'Upon the whole, I will beg leave to tell the House what is really my opinion. It is that the Stamp Act be repealed absolutely, totally, and immediately. That the reason for the repeal be assigned, because it was founded on an erroneous principle.'

Is it fanciful to imagine that this playful and yet serious quotation would have flowed more naturally from some of our best Parliamentary orators than from others? I seem as if I could almost hear it from the lips of Charles Fox, of George Canning, of Lord Derby,

of Palmerston. I should start, and almost wonder where I was, if I heard it from the second Pitt, from Sir Robert Peel, from Lord Shaftesbury, from Mr. Gladstone.

V

I fear, my friends, if any friend is still remaining, that I may have wearied you with these long extracts from a single speech. If it was an error of judgement, it was an error deliberately hazarded. I wished to show you Chatham at his best; and this his last speech in the House of Commons has always seemed to me at least equal to any of those which have been well reported, and one which most vividly portrays the man. To venture on a rather vulgar phrase, it is Chatham all over. His fire, his intrepidity, his passion for freedom, his self-confidence, his contempt for opponents, his terse, crisp, simple, idiomatic words, all are here. You feel as you listen to him, that there is behind him, so to speak, a rich *hinterland*—a grand historic Past. As General Conway said of him in this very debate, 'Whatever falls from that gentleman falls from so great a height as to make a deep impression.'

Something of the same kind was felt, so I seem to remember, between the summer of 1846 and the fatal 28th of June, 1850, when Sir Robert Peel, driven from what is called 'power', spoke at rare intervals on matters of grave moment. He had become, as only the greatest become, a historical as well as a political figure. He spoke with authority. He had done great things, and not a few hoped that he might live to do more.

So it was with Pitt in 1766, and for a time the general expectation seemed likely to be gratified. On the 18th

of March the Bill to repeal the Stamp Act received the Royal Assent. A few weeks afterwards, the Ministry of Lord Rockingham, which passed it, was dismissed by the King, and on the 30th of July Mr. Pitt became Prime Minister as Lord Privy Seal, and, to the general amazement, entered the House of Lords as the Earl of Chatham.

To-day we are dealing with this great man not directly as a Statesman but as an Orator. We shall therefore pass over the mysterious illness which almost at once unnerved him, and for just three years and a half secluded him from the public eye. It was a veritable eclipse. While it lasted, grievous things were done. At home the liberty of the subject was wantonly invaded. Abroad fresh wrongs were inflicted on America, wrongs which no timely legislation could any longer repeal.

At length, at the beginning of 1770, Lord Chatham returned to Parliament, I had almost said returned to life. As Macaulay says of this startling resurrection, 'It was a strange recovery. Men had been in the habit of talking of him as of one dead; and, when he first showed himself at the King's levée, started as if they had seen a ghost.'

I hope that some of my hearers know and admire as much as I do the fascinating book published some thirty-two years ago by my dear friend, Sir George Trevelyan, under the title of *The Early Years of Charles James Fox*. If so, they will remember his brilliant chapter on 'the effect produced by the re-appearance of Chatham'; how he compares it with the breathless scene in *Measure for Measure*, where Lucio pulls aside the cowl of the Friar, and discloses the features of the Ruler who has returned at the moment when he is least expected, to call his Deputy to account for the evil deeds that had been done in his name.

So now, when the Absentee at last returns, there is at once a centrifugal *sauve qui peut.* The Cabinet of Grafton, that still in a way bears the name of Chatham, suddenly dissolves, as by a kind of spontaneous combustion. One member after another vanishes into space, each in his different way conscience-stricken. The scene-painting is not unworthy of Tacitus or Carlyle. The author triumphantly attains his object, which is to show the amazing political influence which the veteran statesman even then exercised.

Our present object is far humbler and much more limited. It is to give some impression of the way in which he *spoke.*

At the time of his return to Parliament there were two main questions which during those eight years, the years in which, in Macaulay's phrase, 'Junius had taken the field,' were chiefly agitating the minds of Englishmen. The one was the controversy as to John Wilkes. The other was the renewal of virtual hostilities with the American colonies. The first involved the liberty of the English citizen. The second involved the disruption of the British Empire.

As regards Wilkes and his repeated expulsions from the House of Commons, after repeated re-elections by his Middlesex constituents, Chatham had convinced himself that the House of which he had so long been the ornament was now exercising its power tyrannically. 'I have considered the matter,' he says in his first utterance on returning to Parliament on January 9, 1770, 'I have considered it with most serious attention, and as I have not in my own breast the smallest doubt that the present universal discontent of the nation arises from the proceedings of the House of Commons upon the expulsion of Mr. Wilkes, I think that we ought, in our Address, to state that matter to the King. I have drawn up an amendment to the Address.'

It was on this occasion that Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, made his oracular declaration that he had never delivered any opinion upon the legality of the proceedings of the House of Commons on the Middlesex election. 'He had locked it up in his own breast, and it should die with him.' He strongly objected to Chatham's amendment, which was negatived by an overwhelming majority, the Address to the King being carried by 203 to 36.

It was in the course of this debate that, pleading for the liberty of the citizen to a very unpropitious audience, Chatham gave utterance to some of his best-remembered sayings.

'It is to your ancestors, my Lords, it is to the English Barons that we are indebted for the laws and constitution we possess. Their virtues were rude and uncultivated, but they were great and sincere. Their understandings were as little polished as their manners, but they had hearts to distinguish right from wrong. They had heads to distinguish truth from falsehood. They understood the rights of humanity, and they had spirit to maintain them. My Lords, I think that history has not done justice to their conduct, when they obtained from their Sovereign that great acknowledgement of national rights contained in Magna Charta. They did not confine it to themselves alone, but delivered it as a common blessing to the whole people.

'They did not say, "These are the rights of the great Barons," or "These are the rights of the great Prelates". No, my Lords, they said, in the simple Latin of the times, *Nullus liber homo*, and provided as carefully for the meanest subject as for the greatest.

'These are uncouth words, and sound but poorly in the ears of scholars, neither are they addressed to the criticism of scholars, but to the hearts of freemen. These three words, *Nullus liber homo,* have a meaning which

interests us all. They deserve to be remembered. They are worth all the Classics. Let us not, then, degenerate from the glorious example of our ancestors. Those Iron Barons (for so I may call them when compared with the *Silken* Barons of modern days) were the guardians of the people; yet their virtues, my Lords, were never engaged in a question of such importance as the present. A breach has been made in the constitution. The battlements are dismantled, the citadel is open to the first invader. The walls totter. The place is no longer tenable. What then remains for us but to stand foremost in the breach, to repair it, or to perish in it?'

Am I disrespectful to a great name if I dare to fancy that some of the more cynical of my audience—if indeed there can be any cynics in Oxford on a May day like this—may be tempted to say of these last sentences what Mr. Burke said of Chatham more generally, 'He talks fustian'? Even if this harsh verdict be recorded, it will hardly be extended to one other short sentence with which we will take leave of this once celebrated speech:

'My Lords, I am sensible of the importance and difficulty of this great crisis. At a moment such as this we are called upon to do our duty without dreading the resentment of any man. But if apprehensions of this kind are to affect us, let us consider what we ought to respect most, the representative or the collective body of the people. My Lords, five hundred gentlemen are not ten millions; and if we must have a contention, let us take care to have the English nation on our side.'

It will, I think, be agreed that in these last words there is no 'fustian'.

VI.

This speech was, as we have seen, delivered early in the January of 1770. It was followed up by at least four other speeches in the same year on pressing

matters of both home and foreign policy, each showing that the energy of the veteran orator was scarcely diminished, especially in that department of oratory which Mr. Disraeli once described as 'that ornament of debate, invective'.

Time forbids me to invite your attention to any of these debates, stirring as they were. We must hasten on to the years 1774 and 1775, when Parliament was again called upon to deal with renewed troubles in America.

In 1772 and 1773 Lord Chatham had rarely been well enough to be in his place. But in May, 1774, when Lord North's Government brought in a Bill for quartering troops in America, he braced himself up for a fresh effort. It is, I think, the one of all his speeches which has the least colouring of invective. Its appeal, coming from such a man and at such an hour, is even pathetic.

I will quote but a few sentences. We must reserve ourselves for a later speech on almost the same subject but differing widely in its tone.

'My Lords,' he now says, 'I am an old man'—sixty-five in fact—'and would advise the noble Lords in office to adopt a more gentle method of governing America; for the day is not far distant when America may vie with these kingdoms, not only in arms but in arts also. It is no new doctrine, but has always been my received and unalterable opinion, and I will carry it to my grave, that this country had no right under heaven to tax America.' Such proceedings will never meet with their wished-for success. . . . Rather I would urge you to adopt some lenient measures, which may lure them to their duty. Act like a kind and affectionate parent towards a child whom he tenderly loves. . . . Pass an amnesty on all their youthful errors. Clasp

them once more in your fond and affectionate arms; and, I will venture to affirm, you will find them children worthy of their sire. . . . The period is not far distant when our country will want the assistance of her most distant friends. But should the all-disposing hand of Providence prevent me from affording her my poor assistance, my prayers shall be ever for her welfare. Length of days be in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. May her ways be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths be peace!'

This appeal, surely impressive and dignified, received but sixteen votes. The Government measure for sending out troops received fifty-seven.

Seven months afterwards, on January 20, 1775, just two months before Burke's celebrated speech on 'Conciliation with America', a debate arose in the Lords of a much sharper edge. Serious riots, clearly foreseen as the result of the policy which Chatham had condemned, had again broken out. Chatham himself moved 'to withdraw the troops from Boston'. 'I will not', he cried, 'desert for a moment the conduct of this weighty business from the first to the last. Unless nailed to my bed by the extremity of sickness, I will give it unremitted attention. I will knock at the door of this sleeping and confounded Ministry, and will rouse them to a sense of their danger. . . . I contend not for indulgence but for justice to America. But it is not repealing this or that Act of Parliament, it is not repealing a piece of parchment, that can restore America to our bosom. You must repeal her fears and her resentments, and you may then hope for her love and gratitude. . . . We shall be forced ultimately to retract. Let us retract while we can, not when we must. I say we must necessarily undo these violent, oppressive Acts. They must be repealed.

You will repeal them. I pledge myself for it, that you will in the end repeal them. I stake my reputation on it. I will consent to be taken for an idiot if they are not finally repealed. Avoid, then, this humiliating necessity. With a dignity becoming your exalted situation, make the first advances to concord, to peace, and to happiness; for that is your true dignity, to act with prudence and justice. That *you* should be the first to concede is obvious. . . .'

And then, as in the House of Commons nine years before he had quoted those two domestic lines of Prior,

> Be to her faults a little blind,
> Be to her virtues very kind,

so now he ends with the imperial lines from Virgil, perhaps still more familiar than that modern couplet to the Public School senators of that generation,

> Tuque prior, tu parce, genus qui ducis Olympo,
> Proice tela manu, sanguis meus!

Or, if I may quote the feeling version of my very dear old Oxford friend, Professor Conington,

> Nay, children, nay, your hate unlearn,
> Nor 'gainst your country's vitals turn
> The valour of her sons:
> And thou, do thou the first refrain;
> Cast down thy weapons on the plain,
> Thou, born of Jove's Olympian strain,
> In whom my life-blood runs.

A special interest of a personal character attaches to this fine speech. Two hearers were present in the gallery, who have given us their impressions, neither of them, it must be owned, quite impartial, but each worth hearing. The first was the young William Pitt, then nearly fifteen and a half, already a venerable Undergraduate at our Pembroke College in his second year.

It would seem that at Cambridge a hundred and fifty years ago there was a gracious custom that whenever our great Cambridge orators, Prime Ministers or ex-Prime Ministers, were to make great speeches in Parliament, their sons were allowed a College Exeat for the night for the purpose of reporting to the University on the proficiency or consistency of their fathers.

If, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, such a custom has prevailed in your Colleges since the days that Oxford began to breed Prime Ministers, I can imagine that some youthful members of some famous College, perhaps some Ireland Scholars or some brilliant Presidents of the Union, may have availed themselves so habitually of this special privilege during the last hundred years, as to perplex the most indulgent Tutor and the least suspicious Dean.

It was, you will remember, in January, 1775, that Chatham delivered what I may be permitted to call his 'Tuque prior, tu parce' speech.

The next morning we find young Pitt, even then a critic, thus reporting to his mother, Lady Chatham:

'I can now tell you correctly. My father has slept well, without any burning in the feet or restlessness. He has had no pain, but is lame in one ankle near the instep, from standing so long. No wonder he is lame. His first speech lasted above an hour, and the second half an hour—surely the two finest speeches that ever were made before, unless by himself.'

Such is the criticism of a dear, a loving, and a wondrously gifted son, a boy of fifteen. The other critic is a very different personage, a man of full age, the shrewd, inventive, oracular American, Benjamin Franklin, the great man who, among many other oracular replies, settled one social question for ever without appeal.

He was once, they say, consulted by a friend on a delicate matter, probably not without parallel. How could his friend best discover if a lady to whom he was tentatively attached but not yet hopelessly engaged was possessed of any faults? What was the answer of the Pennsylvanian Sage, the illustrious inventor of the lightning conductor? 'Praise her,' he said, 'praise her before her female friends.'

Such was the man, or at least a part of the man, who on that 20th day of January was also present in the House of Lords. He was personally introduced, we are told, by Chatham himself, who esteemed him highly. And what was the impression left upon him?

'I was quite charmed', he says, 'with Lord Chatham's speech. He impressed me with the highest idea of him as a great and most noble statesman.' Writing afterwards to Lord Stanhope, Chatham's kinsman, he says, 'he is filled with admiration of that truly great man. He has seen in the course of his life sometimes eloquence without wisdom, and often wisdom without eloquence' —perhaps *we* might put it the other way—'but in the present instance he sees both united, and both, as he thinks, in the highest degree possible.'

This, you will remember, was early in 1775. For nearly two years Chatham was again a recluse, and for the same reason of health. In 1777, on May 30, he reappeared for the first time in the House of Lords, in all the sad pomp of ineradicable gout, wrapped in flannels and supported upon crutches. Again young William Pitt was present, just two days after his own eighteenth birthday, and again he sends his mother an almost rapturous report of what he had seen and heard. The subject was in substance the old one, the revolt in America, but two years had done their work. Of this the very first words of the crippled orator are a proof.

He moves for an Address to the Crown to put a stop to hostilities in America, and his speech begins without preamble: 'My Lords, this is a flying moment; perhaps but six weeks left to arrest the dangers that surround us. The gathering storm may break; it has already opened and in part burst.' This is the speech in which he taunts the Ministry with hiring soldiers from abroad to crush British subjects lately so loyal. 'You have ransacked every corner of Lower Saxony; but forty thousand foreign boors never can conquer ten times the number of British freemen. You may ravage, you cannot conquer. It is impossible. You cannot conquer the Americans. . . . I might as well talk of driving them before me with this crutch.'

A bold stroke for a gouty invalid, but, coming from such a man at such a crisis and with such a voice and eye, doubtless impressive.

The young eager son, conscious already of a genius of his own, can hardly have been shocked by it, though he may have been startled. This at least I should gather from what he wrote to his mother next morning:

'I cannot help expressing to you how happy beyond description I feel in reflecting that my Father was able to exert, in their full vigour, the sentiments and eloquence which have always distinguished him. His first speech took up half an hour, and was full of all his usual force and vivacity. I only regretted that he did not always raise his voice enough for all the House to hear everything he said. If they felt as I did, however, they must have heard abundantly enough to be charmed and transported. . . . He spoke a second time in answer to Lord Weymouth, to explain the object of his motion.... This he did in a flow of eloquence, and with a beauty of expression, animated and striking beyond description.'

Once again in this year 1777 Chatham was to speak, and again the subject was America. Parliament had re-opened in November, and the Address to the King was little suited to procure a peace. Chatham is profoundly depressed at the humiliated state of the country which twenty years before he had made and left so great.

'But yesterday,
And England might have stood against the world:
Now none so poor to do her reverence.'

Again he insists, 'You cannot conquer America,' and, apart from this impossibility, he has the front to declare, 'If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I never would lay down my arms, never! never! never!'

This is the speech in which he makes his famous but hardly discreet reply to Lord Suffolk, who had urged, in defence of the employment of the Indian tribes in America, that it was perfectly justifiable to 'use all the means that God and nature put into our hands'. Then followed the amazing outburst which critics will estimate according to their temperaments, in which the impassioned orator, scarcely remembering what he had himself sanctioned twenty years before, denounces such 'abominable principles as equally abhorrent to religion and humanity'; 'they shock me as a lover of honourable war and a detester of murderous barbarity'.

And then he makes his fervent appeal to the Bishops and the Judges to join in protest against such a pollution; and, pointing to the tapestry on the walls of the House representing the destruction of the Spanish Armada, he taunts Lord Suffolk with the exploits of his 'immortal ancestor', Lord Howard of Effingham, 'who led your victorious fleets against the invaders of Spain,' and had ordered this pictured monument to bé wrought in the looms of Holland.

Critics may, I think, venture to doubt the sobriety and the good taste of this celebrated outburst. For myself, I have not the heart to criticize. I seem to hear the old man's closing words, so nearly his very last:

'My Lords, I am old and weak'—only five days before he had completed his sixty-ninth year—'but my feelings and my indignation were too strong to have said less. I could not have slept this night in my bed, or have reposed my head on my pillow, without giving this vent to my eternal abhorrence of such preposterous and enormous principles.'

Lord Brougham tells us, I do not know on what authority, what seems to be in itself unlikely, that Chatham himself revised this speech. Young William Pitt does not appear to have been present. The only contemporary comment that has come under my notice is what Lord Stanhope, in his *History of England*, quotes from the Memoirs of the Duke of Grafton, Chatham's former colleague, once greatly alienated from him but now again reconciled:

'It would be useless', writes the Duke, 'to attempt to describe to you the brilliancy of Lord Chatham's powers as an orator on this memorable occasion, for no relation can give more than a faint idea of what he really displayed. In this debate he exceeded all that I had ever admired in his speaking. Nothing could be more eloquent and striking than the argument and language of his first speech. But in his reply to Lord Suffolk's inhuman position he started up with a degree of indignation that added to the force of the sudden and unexampled burst of eloquence which must have affected any audience, and which appeared to me to surpass all that we have ever heard of the celebrated oratory of Greece or Rome.'

VII

It is impossible to close our sketch without at least naming the final scene, which, like the death-bed on the conquered heights of Abraham, and the death-bed in the cockpit of the *Victory*, and the death-bed in the house at Putney Heath with the rolling up of the map of Europe and the last sad words, 'How I leave my country!', is one of the august and mournful memories that Englishmen have agreed to cherish as a nation's heirlooms. The scene has been again and again depicted by skilled hands.

Lord Stanhope and Macaulay described it very beautifully more than fifty years ago. Mr. Frederic Harrison, Dr. Holland Rose, and Sir George Trevelyan have in recent works again refreshed our memories. It is one of the most touching passages in Sir George's latest volume, *George the Third and Charles Fox.* For ourselves at this moment a few plain words must suffice.

The news from America grows worse and worse. There is a growing conviction in the country, and among Ministers themselves, that Lord Chatham must be called in; that he and he alone is equal to the crisis. Lord Stanhope's words[1] seem to me at once moderate and forcible. 'The tide', he says, 'in favour of Lord Chatham was setting in too strong to be resisted. Great as was the King's aversion, he must soon have yielded. It seems to me beyond all doubt that had Lord Chatham's last and fatal illness been delayed a few weeks, perhaps even a few days longer, he would have been called to the head of public affairs, and invited, with such friends as he might choose, to solve the problem he had himself propounded—to regain the affections, while refusing the independence, of America.'

[1] *History of England*, vol. vi, chap. lvii, p. 226.

Strong as this language is, that of Mr. Lecky[1] is scarcely less emphatic. 'There was one man to whom, in this hour of panic and consternation, the eyes of all patriotic Englishmen were turned. . . . Lord North, the Prime Minister, implored the King to accept his resignation, and to send for Chatham. Bute, the old Tory favourite, breaking his long silence, spoke of Chatham as now indispensable. Lord Mansfield, the bitterest and ablest rival of Chatham, said, with tears in his eyes, that unless the King sent for Chatham, the ship would assuredly go down.'

But the experiment was not to be tried. On April 6, 1778, the old man wrote a short and gentle letter to the Duke of Richmond, whom he esteemed, saying that he hoped to be in his place 'to-morrow' in the House of Lords, and to express his sentiments on his Grace's motion, which was practically to recognize American independence.

He was led into the House on that memorable 'morrow'—how often have we heard and been thrilled by the story—by two young men, his son-in-law Lord Mahon, and his younger son William. He was dressed in a rich suit of black velvet, and covered to the knees in flannel. He supported himself on crutches. The Lords stood up and made a lane for him to his seat. He bowed to them on his way.

The Duke of Richmond made his motion, to which Chatham listened with profound attention. Soon after, he rose from his seat slowly and with difficulty, leaning on his crutches, and supported by his two young kinsmen.

You will allow me to give you just the opening and the closing sentences. Taking one hand from his crutch, he raised it, and, casting his eyes towards heaven,

[1] *History*, vol. iv, chap. xiv, p. 80.

he said: 'I thank God that I have been enabled to come here this day to perform my duty, and to speak on a subject which has so deeply impressed my mind. I am old and infirm—have one foot, more than one foot, in the grave. I have risen from my bed to stand up in the cause of my country, perhaps never again to speak in this House.'

So he began. As to the effect, two things are known to us.

One is—who does not even now feel it?—the reverent stillness of the House—'if any one had dropped a handkerchief, the noise would have been heard.'

The other is the testimony of his friend and former Chancellor, Lord Camden, who writes, 'He was not like himself. His speech faltered, his sentences were broken, his mind not master of itself. His words were shreds of unconnected eloquence and flashes of the same fire which, Prometheus-like, he had stolen from heaven.'

And then the closing words, the last ever to be uttered articulately by one who had for more than thirty years been the pride and the spokesman of England: 'I am not, I confess, well informed of the resources of this kingdom, but I trust it has still sufficient to maintain its just rights. My Lords, any state is better than despair. Let us at least make one effort, and if we must fall, let us fall like men.'

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I should scarcely venture to offer any comment of my own on this solemn scene. But one Oxford memory comes over me which you, and perhaps others, will, I think, pardon.

I know not whether the Roman History of Dr. Arnold is still read and respected in his own University, but I do know that as far back as 1840 he wrote some words in his second volume which, more than sixty years ago, deeply moved one young Harrow and Cambridge man.

Arnold is describing the debate in the Roman Senate on the harsh terms of peace proposed by King Pyrrhus. Appius Claudius, the famous Censor, was now in extreme old age, and had been for many years blind. He now desired to be carried to the Senate, and was borne in a litter by his slaves through the Forum.

When it was known that Appius Claudius was coming, his sons and sons-in-law went out to the steps of the Senate-house to receive him, and he was by them led into his place. The whole Senate kept the deepest silence as the old man arose to speak.

And then follows what I think I may call not only the touching but the characteristic comment of Dr. Arnold, who was so suddenly taken away from the eyes of your fathers on June 12, exactly seventy years ago. 'No Englishman', he writes, 'can have read so far without remembering the scene, in all points so similar, which took place within our fathers' memory in our own House of Parliament. We recollect how the greatest of English statesmen, bowed down by years of infirmity like Appius, but roused, like him, by the dread of approaching dishonour to the English name, was led by his son and son-in-law into the House of Lords, and all the Peers with one impulse arose to receive him.

'We know the expiring words of that mighty voice, when he protested against the dismemberment of this ancient monarchy, and prayed that, if England must fall, she might fall with honour. The real speech of Lord Chatham against yielding to the coalition of France and America will give a far more lively image of what was said by the blind Appius in the Roman Senate than any fictitious oration which I could either copy from other writers or endeavour myself to invent; and those who would wish to know how Appius spoke should read the dying words of the great orator of England.'

I think, Sir, or rather I feel, that you will forgive this digression. Whatever brings together the noblest impulses of two great imperial nations over a seeming gulf of two thousand years, and again—may a Cambridge man presume to say it?—whatever brings back even for a moment the name and thoughts of a great Oxford teacher to whom all that is noblest in Education is eternally indebted, can never perhaps, in his own beloved Oxford, be thought wholly irrelevant.

VIII

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I am but too conscious that my performance of the task which you so generously confided to me has been far below what your kindness deserved.

I have tried to place before you a majestic Figure of the Past, not as a whole, not as a man and a statesman, but in part only, as an Orator, as one who, by the mighty gift of speech, had power, as few have had in any age or country, to sway the hearts and stir the pulses of a nation, and in no slight degree to turn the currents of history and mould the destinies of mankind. This limited task I could only hope to perform by repeated extracts from his own speeches and from the judgements passed upon him by the men of his time and by later writers—biographers, historians, essayists, and critics.

I have made no pretence of originality or research. Perhaps, indeed, there is now but little new to be said of Chatham by any man, certainly not by me, after the witness of Walpole, Wraxall, Charles Butler, Grafton, Burke, and others at the time, and, since then, the searching, penetrating analyses of men like Grattan, Brougham, Macaulay, Lord Stanhope, Lecky, Frederic Harrison, Lord Rosebery, Sir George Trevelyan, Dr. Holland Rose, Mr. Winstanley.

More than sixty years ago the taunt was levelled against a great Minister, once the Member for your University, that 'his life had been one vast Appropriation Clause'. The sarcasm, utterly unmerited by that high-minded Statesman, appears to your Romanes Lecturer of to-day exactly to hit off his own very humble performance. It *is* one long undisguised 'appropriation' of the brains and pens of others, one long, he fears tedious, plagiarism.

The ethics of plagiarism have never, so far as I know, been reduced to a system. The thief does not stand high in public estimation, or perhaps in his own, but his *motive* is sometimes leniently judged. Many of my hearers, those especially whose recent memories or dawning hopes are closely linked with Oxford Moderations, will remember the crowning scene in the *Knights* of Aristophanes, where poor Cleon, convicted at last by his own confessions of too glaring obligations to the public treasury, attempts to soften hearts and to stay immediate execution by the pathetic apology,

'Well, if I stole, 'twas for the public weal.'[1]

That, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, is my own humble and most respectful plea.

I thought, nay I knew, that I could best serve you by reminding some, and perhaps informing others, what had been the verdicts of the best judges of your great Oxford orator of the eighteenth century. It is easy to belittle oratory, to contrast Rhetoric with Philosophy, to contend that it is the automatic weapon of the charlatan as well as of the patriot.

My object, rather than my hope, has been to re-awaken, however faintly, some echoes of the kingly voice of a

[1] ΔΗΜ. ὦ μιαρέ, κλέπτων δή με ταῦτ' ἐξηπάτας;
ἐγὼ δέ τυ ἐστεφάνιξα κἀδωρησάμαν.
ΚΑ. ἐγὼ δ' ἔκλεπτον ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ γε τῇ πόλει.—*Eq.* 1224-6.

genuine Patriot of whom his country is still justly proud. That voice is a nation's possession, 'a possession for ever'. In every free country true eloquence, like true poetry, can never die. It is one of the things which 'cannot be shaken but remain' through all the changes and chances of time, of fashion, of standard, of taste. Young men, who would be patriots, will never in their hearts despise it, though they may often make it a target for light convivial banter.

England expects it, and, for a great while to come, will continue to expect it, from the most gifted and the most cultured of her youth. And when, Sir, I recall, as I do reverently recall on this day and in this historic Theatre, the names of Carteret and Chatham and Fox and Wellesley and Windham and Grenville and Canning and Peel and Stanley and Ashley and Gladstone and Wilberforce and Palmer and Sidney Herbert and Cardwell and Cecil and Gathorne-Hardy and Churchill and Goschen, and others to whose living voices she still respectfully listens, I feel assured, Sir—and it shall be my last word—that when in the years to come she again looks for that high-toned oratory which flows from the happy confluence of heart, of intellect, and of character, she will turn her eyes, and not in vain, not only to many fresh springs of inspiration throughout the Three Kingdoms undreamed of in the days of Chatham and Canning, but also with unabated and unfaltering confidence to her oldest home of learning and chivalry, the venerable and ever-fruitful mother of youthful patriotism, her great University of Oxford.

Oxford: Horace Hart, M.A., Printer to the University

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